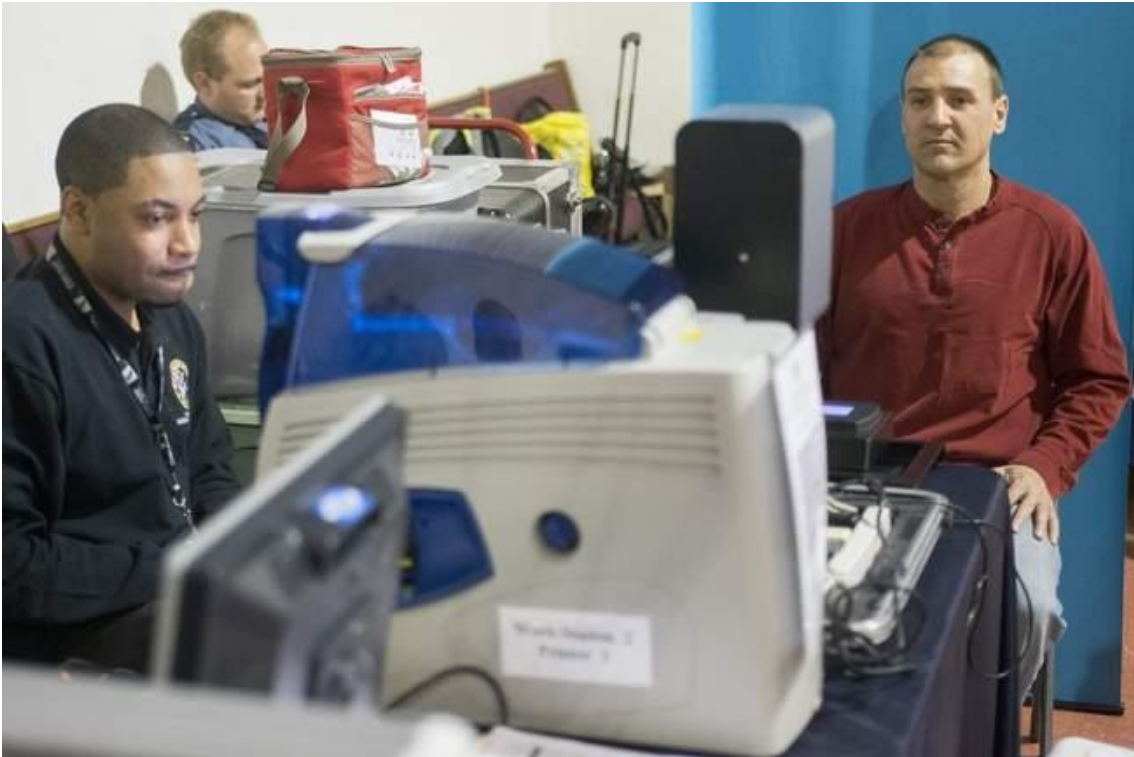


Rockford parolees re-entering society receive hope



Arthur Petit (right) sits up straight as Jeff Ross of the Secretary of State office takes his picture for a state identification card Wednesday, April 23, 2014, during the Illinois Department of Corrections' Summit of Hope at Macedonia Baptist Church in Rockford.
(Photo by MAX GERSH/RRSTAR.COM)

By Chris Green and Kevin Haas, Rockford Register Star
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ROCKFORD — A state-issued picture ID and a driver's license — something most take for granted.

Not Arthur Petit.

"This will make it a lot easier for me to get a job, open a bank account and cash a check," Petit said Wednesday after receiving his state ID.

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Petit, two weeks removed from a seven-month stint in prison, was one of more than 300 people to attend the Summit of Hope, a day-long event hosted Wednesday by the Illinois Department of Corrections to help parolees re-enter society.

The summit, held in a community room at Macedonia Baptist Church, 1720 Morgan St., was billed as a one-stop shop for parolees in need of resources to help them find housing, employment, health care, counseling and other necessities.

Once parolees entered the church and registered, they were assigned to a volunteer who assessed their needs and escorted them to various vendors representing as many as 50 local agencies and state offices such as Rockford Housing Authority, Shelter Care Ministries, Illinois Department of Employment Security and the Illinois Secretary of State.

“We want them to know you are not being thrown away once you leave the Illinois Department of Corrections,” said Miriam Gutierrez, IDOC outreach coordinator. “We are here to help you.”

Parolees in attendance could also sign up for health care provided through the Affordable Health Care Act.

Petit, 46, of Rockford, said he received a blood test for a prostate exam.

“I didn’t know they could do it like that.”

Summits of Hope are held in communities statewide several times a year with the goal of reducing crime by providing ex-offenders with the means to live a productive life.

Jason Garnett, IDOC deputy chief of parole, said recidivism has dropped 8 percent statewide (between 2011 and 2012) in part because of concerted efforts to connect offenders with the resources needed to help them reintegrate into society.

Before the event, Tom Shaer, IDOC director of communications, said, “This is a societal issue, not just a corrections issue.” Ex-offenders, he said, “need to take initiative. They need to take ownership. They need to do their part, but we need to help them do that.”